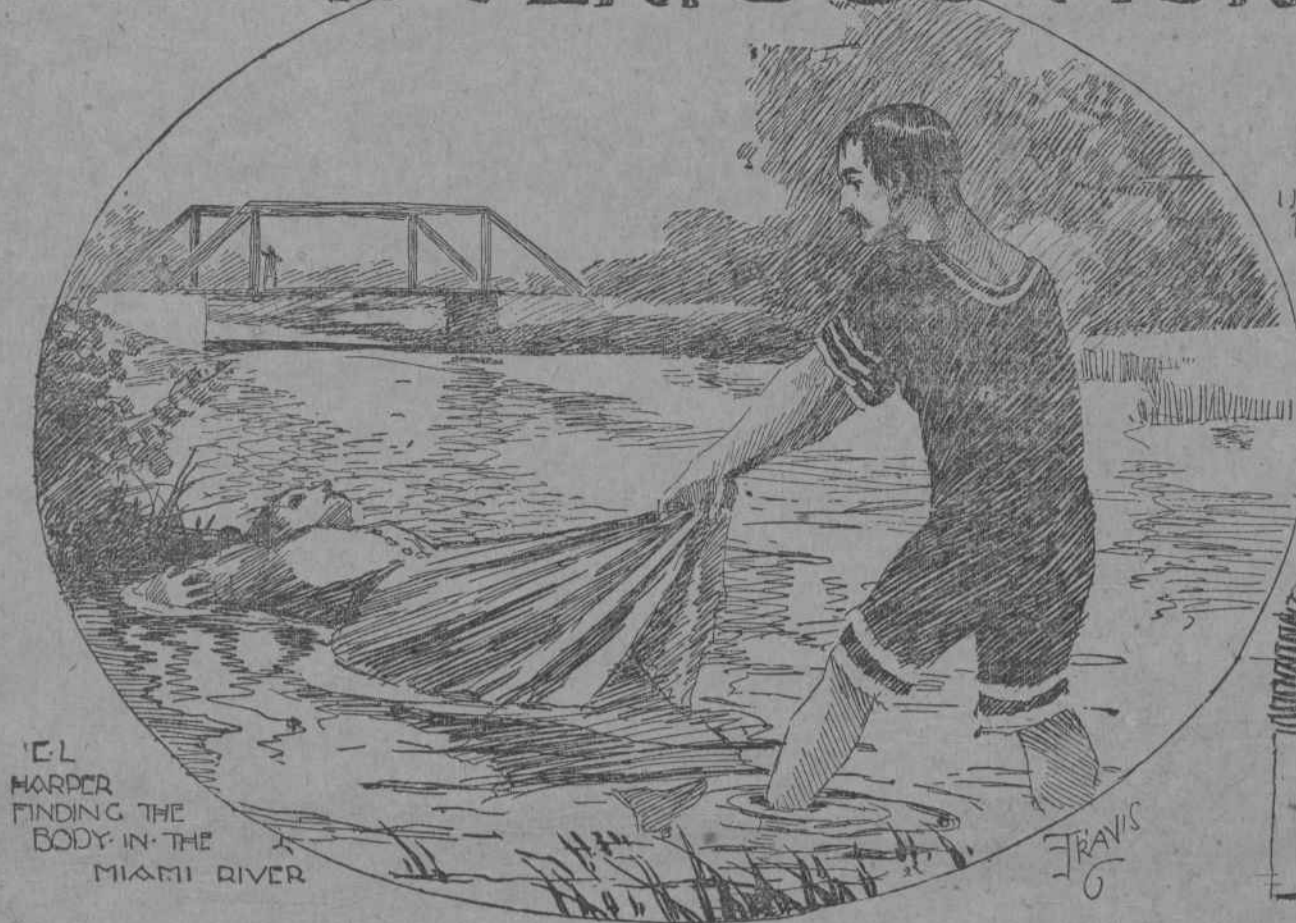
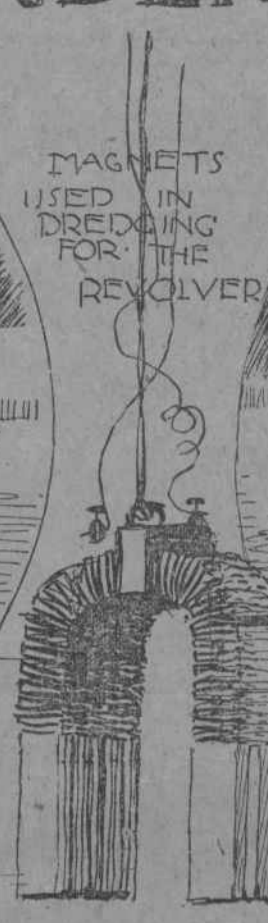


THE MYSTERIOUS MURDER OF BESSIE LITTLE.



E. L. HARPER FINDING THE BODY IN THE MIAMI RIVER.



MAGNETS USED IN DREDGING FOR THE REVOLVER.



DREDGING WITH MAGNETS FOR FRANTZ'S REVOLVER.

Pearl Bryan's case has found a counterpart.

At Dayton, Ohio, Bessie Little, pretty, pleasant, scarcely out of her teens, was miserably murdered by her "lover."

This latest slaughter, brutal, bloody, mysterious, incomprehensible as it is to the normal man, embodies in its circumstances and outcome well nigh every lesson that crime can teach to society.

The sage who wrote "Murder will out" had in mind a long period of concealment, ending, perhaps, only with a deathbed confession. But the maxim was made before the days of the Sherlock Holmes system. The detective science has grown with the other sciences, and they have all contributed an eye of light, an arm of strength and a foot of swiftness. So deftly are its labors done that they look easy.

In the lobby of the Beckel House, in Dayton, one night, Chief of Police T. J. Farrell heard a man standing near him say: "It is nearly time for another Pearl Bryan case."

He accepted it as prophecy, believed it, and stored it in his memory, although the bulletin boards of the police station told them of no missing woman, and no disfigured body lay on the slab at the city undertaker's.

There was nothing to base credence on, but he believed it. A little later, "in the floss and jetsam of street talk," it was told that two men had visited some lawyer in the city and asked him what degree of criminal responsibility rested upon them in the guilty knowledge of the fact that a woman had been murdered and her body thrown into the river.

Who this lawyer was the gossip did not say, and seemingly did not know. But Farrell remarked to himself that this was the second warning.

On Wednesday afternoon, September 2, a young man named E. L. Harper, bathing in the Miami River, near Dayton, saw in the water and dragged ashore the swollen, discolored body of a woman. Farrell sat at his desk when word of the discovery came over the telephone. "I thought so," he said, and remembered what he had heard at the Beckel House. Within thirty seconds he had called the police surgeon and the patrol wagon and was starting for the river. From that moment the whole working of the Dayton police is as good as a play. Patrolmen were ordered to wade into the river and carefully bring out the body. The police surgeon wondered much when told that he must examine it minutely. But he obeyed. In the barn of the undertaking establishment the decomposing marks were gone over. The report was that there was no sign of violence. It was plainly suicide, or, perhaps, accidental drowning.

That did not satisfy Farrell. He had what gamblers call a "hunch." He demanded an autopsy, which was made next morning. Again the same decision. The coroner gave his verdict in accordance with it. The body was buried. Not so the Chief of Police's faith in his inspiration, or his genius for deduction.

That morning a Mrs. Bell called at the police station looking for a friend of hers who was missing. Farrell was dumfounded. The way the thing was working itself out fairly staggered him.

"We have just buried a woman who was found in the river," he said. "Nobody knew her. Have you the courage to see her? She's an awful sight."

"Yes."

They went to the cemetery. The woman stared at the unsightly thing that the workmen drew to view.

"Is that your friend, Mrs. Bell?" asked the Chief.

"No. But I'll tell you who it is. It's Bessie Little."

Fate was with Farrell. Here was his clue. On it he fell to work. Bessie Little, he found, was the adopted daughter of Peter E. Little and his wife, who, well-to-do and childless, had taken her, a winsome but unknown waif, from the foundling asylum of the county almost twenty years before.

If this girl, thought Farrell, had come to her death by suicide, surely the parents would have given notice before this of her long absence from home. That brought the next discovery. Bessie had not been at home for weeks.

Why not? Oh, she had a lover—Albert Frantz. But the old folks didn't approve of him. They quarreled about it, and the girl said she'd rather take her chances with Frantz. She packed her belongings and went away to the Cooper Hotel. Frantz paid her board there for two weeks, and then removed her to a Mrs. Free's boarding house.

On Thursday, August 27, after a hasty supper, she had gone out, telling the landlady, so that worried said, that she was going to ride with Frantz. They had not seen her since, and thought that perhaps she had gone home to her folks again. When she went away she wore a brown dress, skirt and waist alike, and new shoes. The woman found in the river was dressed in precisely the same way. But that was not positive identification. The girl's dentist was found. A dentist's identification is absolute, and he said the body was Bessie Little's. Finally the old man and his wife went to the cemetery, and declared that the frightful corpse which was shown them had been their little girl.

Excitement was high in the town. Ex-Judge Kretzler admitted to the police that he was the lawyer who had received the mysterious visit from the two men, but he refused to tell who they were, and fell back on the consideration due to professional secrecy.

Bessie Little, the police learned, had spoken of suicide once or twice to her girl friends, and especially had talked of drowning, but not a soul of them believed she killed herself. Hers was the merriest nature in the world. She had too great a fear of death. She had even said she was half afraid to go riding with Frantz because he always carried a revolver and was careless with it.

The web was beginning to weave about the lover.

Then came the great discovery. Rummaging among the girl's papers and trinkets, they found a letter she had written to the father of the fellow Frantz, but which she had not posted. It was the old story, and she implored the father to compel his son to right the wrong and wed her. So Farrell had established a motive, and in less than three days he had taken to tell the lover was behind the bars.

Young Frantz, like all of his family and most of his class, has a religious fervor. He is a member, and a more or less ostentatious one, of the Baptist Church. But the world, the flesh and the devil have played a large engagement in his doings, nevertheless. For a living he worked as a stenographer and general clerk in the office of a big planning mill in Dayton. He is a determined-looking youth, with a square, firm-set jaw, and with the sensual story, too, written plainly in his face.

Hardly had the key been turned upon Frantz when three young men—Frank Shipley, Frank Ross and Will Sigler—brought a strange story to Chief Farrell. On the morning of Friday, August 28, they had gone to the river fishing. They reached the bridge at 6:30, followed in single file across its south side, and started down the embankment at the east end. For some reason which they do not know, guided, it would seem, by fate, which had already wrought so wondrously in the case, they went back and started on the return across the north side of the bridge. Midway of it the leader halted, staring, and picked up a tortoise-shell side-comb set with brilliants. Looking a little further, they saw a dark pool of blood. Just beyond it lay the other side-comb. Upon closer investigation they found another blood-puddle, and a great, crimson stain upon the rail, which showed that a bloody body had been poised there and then pitched over.

Through the blood upon the plank there ran the track of a wagon wheel. And westward along the roadway for about 400 feet, toward a densely wooded ravine, there went a trail of blood. Then the tracks were lost.

Farrell was getting on swimmingly. He had no more than committed this startling news to paper and dispatched his officers to search the locality of the bridge when still further testimony came to him.

A family—father, son, wife and daughter—were returning on the night of that mysterious Thursday from a family reunion near Vandalia, in the northern part of the county. Crossing a bridge near to the Stillwater bridge, where the combs and blood had been found, they heard a pistol shot echoing across the prairie from that direction, accompanied by screams as of a woman in distress. They talked of it even after they had reached home, but then forgot it until the news of the tragedy was spread several days later.

So it was certain there had been a murder at the bridge, near which the body of Bessie Little was found, and it had been done upon that Thursday night. Taking the combs, Chief Farrell hurried to the bridge. Mrs. Free said that the combs were Bessie Little's; that Frantz had given them to her.

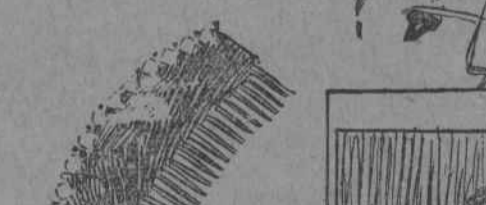
Once again Farrell called in the surgeon. The body had been examined again and again. He had examined it himself. He knew there was no mark on it. But he would not believe what Frantz and a hundred other people kept telling him—that the girl had killed herself.

"Go, cut off that head," he said to the surgeon. "If you do not find a bullet hole I'll resign my position."

JAR IN WHICH BESSIE LITTLE'S HEAD IS SEALED



BULLETS FOUND IN MURDERED GIRL'S HEAD



FRAGMENTS OF FRANTZ'S BUGGY



It was done. Under the right ear of the discolored object the doctor found a ghastly hole. The hair had concealed it before, and the water had washed the blood away and closed the wound.

"Open it," said Farrell. The surgeon removed the scalp and examined the interior of the skull. In the brain were several fragments of lead. These were carefully collected. Farrell piled them together on his desk. There was much more than enough for one bullet of any ordinary calibre. It was plain the girl had been shot twice. In a great jar of alcohol at the Dayton Police Headquarters this revolting exhibit is kept against the day of trial.

It was plain as day to the policeman now, and he set his myrmidons to dragging the river in the vicinity of the bridge in hope of finding the pistol. The town flocked out to witness the operation. Hundreds of people took a hand in it. The banks were lined with the gaping, morbid crowd. The water there was very deep, perhaps eighteen or twenty feet. From the bottom all sorts of rubbish was dragged up, but there was no pistol. Farrell was convinced that it was there, and took a novel way to discover it. He secured ten huge magnets, supplied by a battery. These were lowered with a rope and dragged up and down over the bottom of the river for half a mile in either direction. This novel performance was kept up for days, but in vain. Undismayed, he increased the size and power of the magnets, and persisted in the work. They picked up from the bottom all sorts of metal things, pieces of sewing machines, scraps of iron pipe and what not. There was no question but that these magnets, if they once came near the fatal weapon, would bring it to the surface. Then it would be "all day" with Frantz.

Meantime, what of the bold lover?

No man, probably, ever steeled himself more sternly than did this fellow for the ordeal he had to go through. It was that very thing which proved his undoing. "For," the Sherlock Holmes of a policeman argued, "he is too cool. No man who had loved a woman could act so under such conditions." The news of her wretched death and the gruesome description of all the horrors attending it did not move him. He merely said it was suicide. He declared he had not seen her for a week or so. He had not met her on that fatal Thursday night.

He was asked if he had not called upon Judge Kretzler for advice. Then he stumbled and fell. He admitted that he had. The strain was telling on him. Why had he not reported her absence? He thought she was at her home. Then, beginning to flounder, he refused to answer any more questions until he had seen counsel.

"Whom do you want for counsel?"

The answer damned him still further. He called for Judge Kretzler.

Meantime the detectives had been assiduously following the movements of the girl and the suspected murderer on that eventful Thursday, and all the subsequent events.

Frantz and Bessie Little had been in the habit of riding much together in his buggy. The night after her disappearance Frantz's barn was burned, and with it his horse and buggy. No one had dreamed at the time of the horror that fire was meant to erase the evidence of murder. Frantz had been seen at the fire in his shirt sleeves. His coat had burned, as well as his horse and wagon. People had marked his excited demeanor, but attributed it merely to his sense of loss. Farrell, on the other hand, set full value on it and searched the charred ruins of the stable. The buggy had not been entirely consumed, and from its seat he tore some strips which were strangely discolored. He submitted these to the chemist to see if they were not blood stains. If, as Farrell believed, Frantz had taken the girl riding, and, reaching the lonely neighborhood of the bridge, pulled his revolver and shot her in the head twice, there could not help being blood upon the coat and upon the seat of the wagon. He took the wagon tire to the bridge. It fitted the track found across the blood again.

Analysis of the girl's stomach showed that the food which she had eaten was only partially digested. The chemist said she must have died within two hours after eating. She had supped about 5:30. She had been seen at 6:20 on a street car going in the direction of the Boulevard, where it was her custom to meet Frantz for their drives.

The murderer made an effort, when first arrested, to establish an alibi, but the careful "trilling" of the girl, the timing of the shots and the condition of the stomach made it plain that he could have done his horrible work and still have gotten home in season to have been seen at the time he was. In fact, he was seen returning home unusually early. He had carefully planned out the whole business in advance. That was proven still further by the fact that the morning following the tragedy he called at the boarding house, asked for her, and when told that she had not returned, paid again in advance for her board—though the landlady first refused the money—and went away.

Several times after that he called, as if to convince the people there that he still believed her living. The landlady told him she thought Bessie had gone home, but he made no effort to find her at her parents' home. The case, to Farrell's mind, was complete. It lacked only the master-stroke which followed shortly after. And this is how it came:

The day after his imprisonment Frantz's sister Mattie came to see him. As she went away she handed him a Testament and told him to get all his comfort and consolation from that. From that time on he kept up a constant religious mummery, a praying, a snuffling, a psalm singing, which, to those who knew the facts that had been gathered against him, seemed almost like blasphemy. No visitor, official or otherwise, entered his cell without finding the lusty young villain either reading tender and exalted passages from the teachings of the Saviour or singing in his staccato baritone voice some treasured selection from the "Winnanow Hymns from Sacred Song."

This he kept up until the afternoon of September 10. Then he was called in to hear the reading of the warrant charging him with willful murder. The Chief stopped from the reading, turned to the now pallid and agonized man and asked him: "Do you hear and understand this? He nodded his head, but did not speak. When the solemn words fell upon his ear—"Willful, foul and deliberate murder"—his eyes stared wildly and his breast heaved with the struggle to subdue the turmoil within him. This was the time to take him unawares.

"Now, Frantz," said Chief Farrell, just let me ask you one question. You say that Bessie Little committed suicide by shooting herself. Now did you throw the body into the river first or the revolver first and the body after; or was the contrary true?"

Frantz's nerve and self-possession failed him. He was tangled. He stepped into the trap. After a moment's wandering meditation he answered calmly, distinctly, thoughtfully: "As near as I can remember, I threw the body in first and then the revolver."

Farrell jumped up and ran to the door, opened it and beckoned four newspaper men to enter.

"Now, Chief," cried Frantz in exasperation, "you said there was to be nobody present except you and myself."

"Never mind now," answered Farrell. Didn't you say to me that you threw the body into the river first and the pistol afterward?"

Frantz's answer came like the response of a man talking in his sleep—slowly, as if in effort to remember. "As I told you before, and as far as I can remember, I threw the body in first and the revolver afterward."

"Very well, I will not bother you further, my boy. That's all."

As he moved away, Frantz rubbed a trembling hand over the stubble of beard on his face.

"We will send a barber to the jail," said Farrell.

"It will not be necessary now," was the murderer's answer.

On the heels of that, Farrell employed divers, who examined every inch of the river bottom. To find the pistol, trace it, and prove its purchase by Frantz was all that remained to the Buckeye Hawkshaw. He had learned from Judge Kretzler who the two mysterious men were, had talked with them, but not of them.

And the luck which had followed him so steadily did not fail him in the matter of the pistol. S. W. Poine, a clerk at a Main street gun store, who was sick in bed, sent word that he had sold a revolver, three weeks ago, to a youth of Frantz's description. "Just an ordinary pistol," the young fellow said he wanted, and purchased without question the first weapon shown him. In a wagon Frantz was driven to Poine's house. The clerk looked out, saw him and said: "That is the man."

And Farrell remembered the chance remark he had heard in the Beckel House—"It is nearly time for another Pearl Bryan case."

ALBERT J. FRANTZ THE SUSPECTED MURDERER